

K.I.: Since one of the ways you tend to work is in terms of projects, can you talk about them: how long a project might take you to do, what provokes you to do a certain one?

C.G.: There's no philosophy behind changing the content of my projects from time to time. I just notice that I work intensely on a given subject within a certain camera format for about three or four years. During that time, I'm very wrapped up in that particular project and after a ^{while} ~~time~~ I have exhausted whatever it had offered me. Then I look for something that's fairly different. Often a different camera will serve as a springboard for getting into a different project. It's the discipline or challenge of seeing in a slightly different size and shape of format.

K.I.: How did you become involved in the project of photographing the six sisters?

C.G.: I think all of the projects that I've done grow out of my everyday experience. They're autobiographical. In "Six Sisters: An Extended Portrait," I think it was a combination of reliving my own childhood and looking forward to what it would be like to have a child. That was the emotional content that fired the project. It was also a logical extension of previous work. I had worked in Milton-Park and Centre-Sud areas in Montreal. I lived in Milton-Park but I didn't know the people I photographed very well. Centre-Sud wasn't even my neighbourhood. So the work was sort of a survey of the psychology and sociology of those neighbourhoods: portraits, but portraits on the level of social interaction rather than on an intimate level. ~~So~~ Photographing the six sisters ^{satisfied a desire} ~~was an extension of wanting to take one person,~~ two, three ^{or more} people, and follow them over a long period of time.

K.I.: ^{In the whole body of work, which includes single images and groups of photos, up to four, mounted together, you have different kinds of "extended portraits."} ~~The way I see it, you made extended portraits in a couple of directions. You have both different images of the same person at different times, sometimes at very short intervals, and you~~ ^{There are} ~~And then~~

X ^{there are} ~~have~~ images of the interrelationships between two or three or four of the girls.

X C.G.: In my mind different things happen in the single images as opposed to the multiple ones. In two, three, or four images together, ^{there was emphasis on} ~~they emphasized~~ some sort of shift, and in a couple of the most successful, the shifts were psychological. I would argue that portraiture is primarily a psychological record of an event, and that includes between the subject and yourself.

no new parag. Some of the other ones were more gross shifts, with the kids playing, so the differences from image to image are things like the difference between a kid walking and one swinging.

no new parag. There's one that I like a lot, where the four girls are sitting on a bench. So there are eight legs and they shift positions in each of the four images.

K.T.: Was time an important issue?

X C.G.: ^{yes} ~~Ya.~~ With large format one thing that happens is a tension or contradiction between the stillness of the camera and the action of the kids. So sometimes the images are blurred: someone moves into the frame during the time of the exposure and so on. I was also aware that photographing the little girls had a sort of nostalgic, poignant aspect of stopping moments. It's a fantasy that you can hold onto time to relive an experience.

K.T.: Was the background or environment important?

X C.G.: Not in the same way as the Milton-Park or Centre-Sud portraits, where the background was as important or more ^{important} in terms of the informational content. In the little girls, the person was the central focus and the environment was a secondary echo or reinforcement. I was aware of the backgrounds either in terms of

tonalities or to project a particular mood. Many are fairly dark or middle grey or have a bit of information -- a staircase, a brick wall. I suppose on a sociological level, the girls' clothes were the main environmental objects. It was a household that didn't have books, pictures, a lot of records. So they seemed to put the emphasis on clothing. In some ways visually you can read ^{a lot} ~~what there is to read~~ about the family.

K.I.: The next project was the store windows.

"THE OBJECTS WERE MODEST (IN THE FAMOUS HIERARCHICAL SENSE OF THE WORD): THEY WERE WAISTCOATS, IN A HABER-DASHER'S SMALL DISPLAY WINDOW. THIS MAN, THIS ARTISAN, HAD SEVENTEEN WAISTCOATS TO ARRANGE IN HIS WINDOW, WITH AS MANY SETS OF CUFFLINKS AND NECKTIES SURROUNDING THEM. HE SPENT ABOUT ELEVEN MINUTES ON EACH; WE TIMED HIM. WE LEFT, TIRED OUT, AFTER THE SIXTH ITEM. WE HAD BEEN THERE FOR ONE HOUR IN FRONT OF THAT MAN, WHO WOULD COME OUT TO SEE THE EFFECT AFTER HAVING ADJUSTED THESE THINGS ONE MILLIMETER. EACH TIME HE CAME OUT, HE WAS SO ABSORBED THAT HE DID NOT SEE US. WITH THE DEXTERITY OF A FITTER, HE ARRANGED HIS SPECTACLE, BROW WRINKLED, EYES FIXED, AS IF HIS WHOLE FUTURE LIFE DEPENDED ON IT."¹

WITH ADMIRATION, FERNAND LÉGER DESCRIBES THE SHOPKEEPER'S ARTISTRY, ATTENTION TO DETAIL, AND RIGOROUS DISCIPLINE. WITH THE SAME OBSESSION AND ATTENTION TO DETAIL, CLARA GUTSCHE PHOTOGRAPHS THESE WORKS, TRANSFORMING THEM INTO ANIMATED ARRAYS OF THE MERCHANT'S AND SOCIETY'S CRAFT. CO-DIRECTED BY THE ARTISTAN AND THE

¹ Fernand Léger, "L'esthétique de la machine: l'objet fabriqué, l'artisan et l'artiste," Bulletin de l'Effort Moderne, Paris 1924. Reprinted in Fonctions de la peinture, Éditions Gonthiers 1965, p. 57. Translation Functions of Painting 1973, p. 56.

PHOTOGRAPHER, THE WINDOW DISPLAY BECOMES STREET THEATRE. ADMISSION IS FREE. WANDERING THE STREET OR SEATED IN FRONT OF THESE PICTURES, THE AUDIENCE IS SEDUCED BY THE PERFORMANCE. THE DIALOGUE IS SPARSE; ONLY ONE WORD IS SPOKEN. BUY ... BUY ... BUY ...

X C.G.: The photographs came out of the simple experience of taking
X a walk after supper, ~~at~~ window-shopping after hours. I became
fascinated with the displays both in terms of design and of what
~~it~~^{they} says about our society. There's a great wealth of information
about what we're interested in, what we do, and how we do it.
They become symbolic objects, symbolizing all sorts of complex
relationships that we have between each other and to our society.

X Visually it was also a beginning. You move from one discrete rectangular window to the next with a dark space in between and you begin to get a real sense of series. This experience finally translated into the final visual form of the photographs. I photographed during the day under various light conditions, depending on whether I wanted the reflections to be dominant or the merchandise to be dominant. The images were ~~painted~~^{painted} with a large dark frame around them, so that the windows float in the dark space, which, of course, refers back to the experience of viewing the windows at night.

FRAGMENTED FIGURES, HEADLESS BODIES, AND BODILESS HEADS, FLYING, FLOATING, AND DANCING OBJECTS BECKON US INTO AN ESTABLISHED SPACE. A SPACE DEFINED BY RAKING SUNLIGHT SPOTLIGHTING CENTRAL CHARACTERS OR VEILED LIGHT EVENLY COVERING A MOTLEY CHORUS LINE OF CUPS, ENCLOSED BY A BLACK BORDER WHICH FUNCTIONS AS THE SIDE OF A BUILDING, OR AS A FRAGMENT OF A DARKENED THEATRE. MYSTERIOUS, MAGICAL, MENACING SPACE.

X C.G.: When the light is very overcast you get a fairly somber effect with a lot of reflections; so there is a complex interleaving

and interweaving of the surface reflections -- clouds, buildings, the other side of the street -- and the merchandise. If it is medium overcast, hazy sun, or bright overcast with a few clouds, you often get an intermediary effect with the reflections playing an ~~important~~ role, ~~but~~ ^{or} equal to or perhaps a bit less than the merchandise itself. Bright sun minimizes ~~the shadows to the point of completely eliminating them,~~ ^{es reflections,} sometimes eliminating reflections from the glass itself, so ~~that~~ what you see is primarily ~~the~~ merchandise in the window and, of course, a Visa or MasterCard stuck onto the surface of the glass. ~~Bright sun~~ ^{Sometimes the sunlight} ~~acts as a spotlight and creates the razor-blade shadows,~~ sharp angular shadows which give an edge to the photographs. ~~Sometimes~~ ^{has more of a sense of mood. It} ~~A~~ sense of violence. ^P Part of the overall emotional and intellectual content of the photographs was both an attraction to consumer items, to the whole consumer society, and a repulsion to that society and to the excess of ~~times~~ ^{items}.

MAGICAL, MENACING SPACE.
SAND COMMERCIAL SPACE. OUR CREDIT CARDS WON'T BE CUT UP TODAY. BUT THE OVERPRODUCTION OF GOODS AND SEDUCTION OF CONSUMERS STILL MANAGE TO ELICIT A REACTION. WE OBJECT TO THE SALES PUSH, THE INDOCTRINATION DUPING US INTO BUYING MORE AND MORE. WITH RAZOR-LIKE SHADOWS SLICING THE PICTURE, DECAPITATED BODIES, AND MACABRE SCENES OF HEADS PILED UP IN A CORNER, THE PHOTOGRAPHER HAS FORCED THE ISSUE. THE FANTASY WORLD OF PLAYFUL JUXTAPOSITIONS IS INTERRUPTED BY THE RECOGNITION OF REAL LIFE ISSUES. OUR RESPONSES ARE ACUTE BUT CONTRADICTORY.

C.G.: The mannequins symbolize people, and one thing I was reacting to and identifying with was a certain violence that is done to women. Just the way the mannequins are displayed often symbolizes how people see women in society. People argue that they're just mannequins, but I think that how they're placed, who places them, and why they do it is important to analyze.

X There is a sense of violence and a criticism of that violence on my part; but there's also a real sense of humour. I was laughing at a lot of the things that I found in the windows, and X I in some, ~~of the windows~~ the juxtaposition of objects is simply ridiculous. On a serious level it might symbolize alienation and fragmentation, but on a non-serious level it's absurd, and sometimes touching.

X ~~DRAMATIS PERSONAE ARE UNEXPECTEDLY JUXTAPOSED, THE~~
COUPLING OF FERNS AND GIRDLES, PAMPERS AND PASTRIES,
10-SPEED BIKES AND NEON LIGHTS, STUNS AN ORDERLY MIND.
CIRRUS CLOUDS HANG ABOVE RELIGIOUS PICTURES AND STUFFED
OWLS; A GIGANTIC ULTRA BAN DWARFS A CITY STREET: RIDI-
CULOUS SCENES WHICH MAKE US LAUGH OUTRIGHT AND SIT BACK
IN AMAZEMENT. OR SCENES WHICH HAVE EDGES, FORCING MUF-
FLED LAUGHTER WHICH BETRAYS UNEASINESS.

K.T.: Next project, the park. A series called "Reconstructed Constructions."

X C.G.: I started using an 8 x 10 camera as a way of challenging myself and breaking out of old habits, finding different situations and designs. I spent a year doing murals and flat wall spaces in Montreal, and at the end of the summer I started working with park spaces and playgrounds. It partly grows out of having a small child and spending a huge amount of time in the park. I like to photograph things that are families; ^{ar} The projects all seem to come after I live a particular experience and then the photograph functions as a record or extension of that experience.

K.T.: Did you try to do a systematic investigation of how parks are used, what happens in them?

C.G.: No. My work usually functions on some level that is not conducive to doing systematic analysis. The emotional content is

looser and I like to let that roll in a way that you can't if you set out an almost scientific analysis and comparison of different situations. I'm looking for more subtle changes. I've really zeroed into one park, photographing from all different perspectives. There are sometimes references from one photograph to another; the same objects will keep reappearing in different parts of different photographs.

I like the structures in playgrounds and I enjoy having people entering my photos. Even though they're very small details, they symbolize, to me, "people activity" in the park. Hopefully, the viewer will identify with the people and will experience the photographs through the perspective of seeing somebody in them.

I also like minimalist photographs to a great extent, so that's why some of them have a great stretch of empty foreground and a great stretch of empty white sky and all the details stretch from left to right in the centre. They're horizontal photographs along the horizon line.